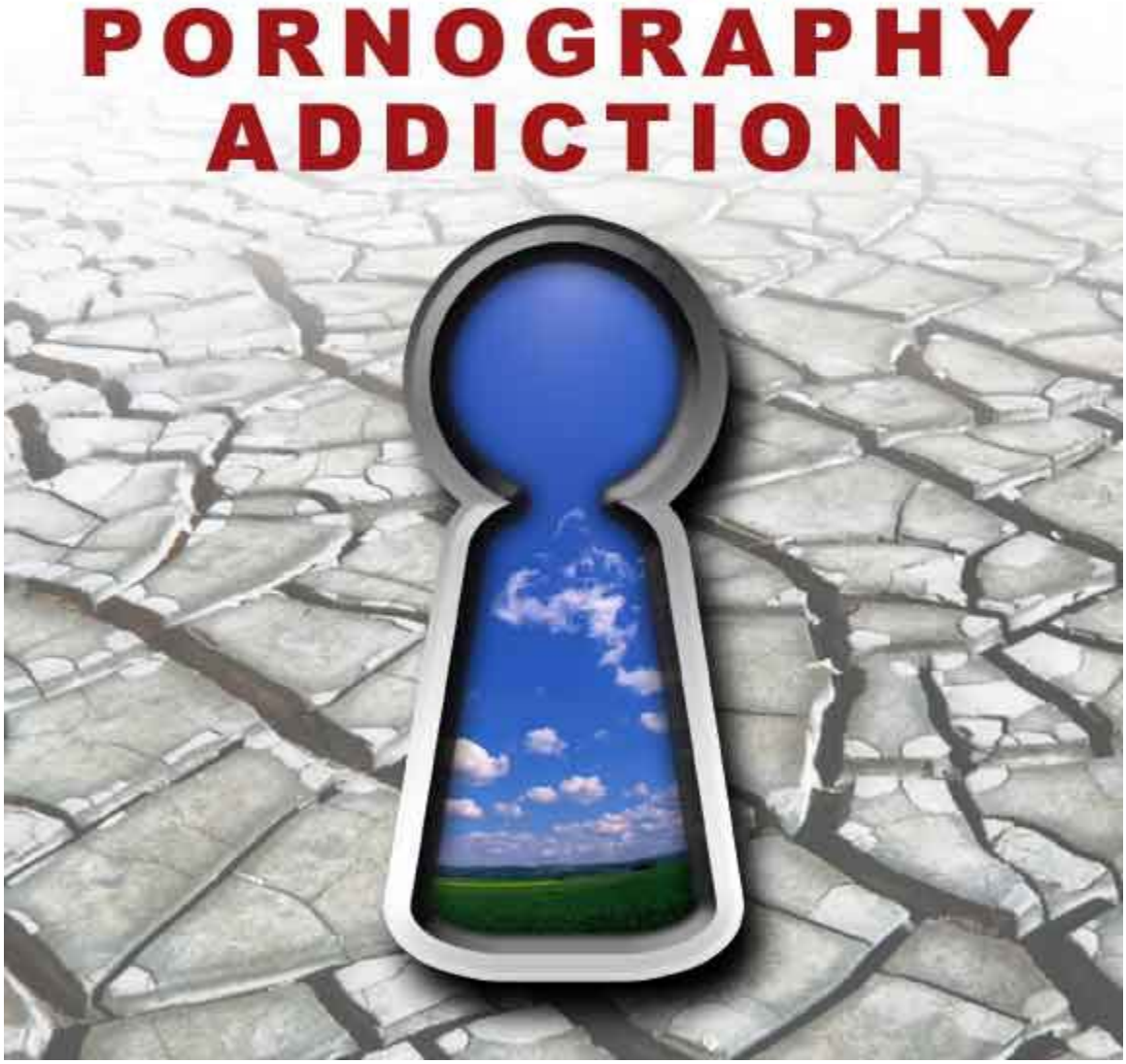
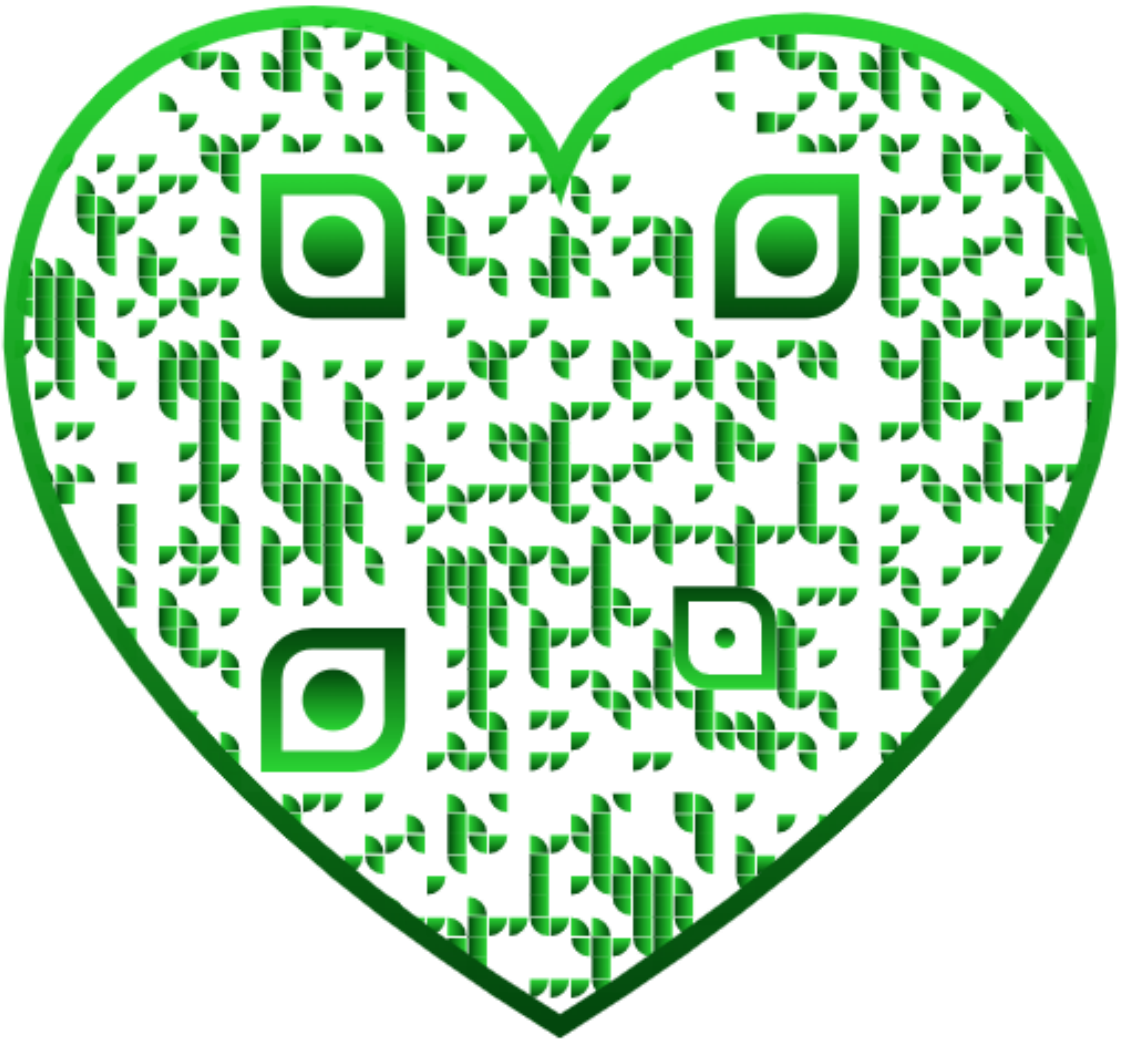
# TEN KEYS

## TO BREAKING PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION





# TEN KEYS TO BREAKING PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION:

TEN THINGS I'VE LEARNED IN TEN YEARS

AS WEBMASTER AT NO-PORN.COM

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# Introduction

Today I got a phone call from a close friend. He's devoutly religious, a father of five, and working toward his retirement pension. But yesterday afternoon he was caught looking at pornography at work. We have been talking to each other for over a year about this behavior. He has expressed numerous times his desire to stop. He has been fully aware that his behavior was putting at risk everything good in his life.

Now he has been caught, but he was extremely lucky. A letter of reprimand was added to his personnel file, and if there are no further incidences the letter will be removed after six months. I can list several other personal acquaintances that were not so lucky.

Do you know what my friend's reaction to being caught was? Tremendous humiliation *and* pure relief.

He will now work day-to-day and face-to-face with five superiors who all know about his inappropriate behavior. On the other hand, he didn't lose his job, which was partly why he is relieved. Most of his relief, however, is because he believes he will not act out any more now that his actions are known and he will be terminated if he uses his work computer to look at porn again. He doesn't want to act out and he is actually grateful for this motivation to stop.

The people he reports to – the women and men who have entrusted him with leadership responsibilities within his organization – have seen his file with his Internet usage report including a sample of the hundreds of pictures he was viewing.

And now, bizarrely, this humiliation makes him hopeful for the increased incentive to stop.

This is what porn addiction is. If you are addicted to pornography, then you probably understand the nonsensical paradox: You want to stop/you don't want to stop. You fear the risks/you ignore the risks. Porn makes you feel bad/Porn makes you feel great.

Cyber sex, adult book stores, adult web sites, phone sex, erotic stories, magazines, DVDs, computer games, text messaging, file sharing, newsgroups – there are many ways to act out. What defines the addiction is not what you do to get high on lust, but the ambiguity of wanting to stop and at the same time not wanting to stop and feeling like you can't stop.

I know something about the absurdity of pornography addiction. I was introduced to pornography as a child and spent all of my teenage years and much of my adult life medicating my problems, pains and unhappiness with pornography, lust and compulsive masturbation. As an adult, starting in my early twenties, I began to look for ways to overcome this addiction. The solution was amazingly elusive.

I suppose that's why I'm writing this book. I've been the webmaster of No-porn.com and its earlier incarnations for over a decade at this writing. I thought a good way to celebrate these ten years of work might be to write a book about some of the things I've learned along the way, things I've learned mostly about myself as I've walked the path to recovery. I'm hopeful that by sharing my thoughts with you that you will find ideas to help you. I'm hopeful that I can offer you a keychain of resources and that on that keychain you'll find something perfect for you – something that opens the lock and releases the chains of addiction wrapped tightly around you. I hope that you will discover the happiness of living a life free from pornography. I hope that those around you will be able to enjoy discovering a new you, someone who lives life fully, with remarkable joy, patience, love and resilience.

I want to thank members of the Support Board forum who provided feedback as I was writing this. However, the opinions expressed here are my own, based on my own experience and study and I take responsibility for the flaws. Many of these ideas I've culled from other resources, and I will always share the source of these ideas with you so you can do even more research. Because my experience is unique, not every idea here may apply to you; yet, I believe something should resonate for you. I have no professional or clinical training in human psychology; however, I share my experience with you, and I hope that you find it useful.

I'd love to hear from you. Email me at TenKeys@no-porn.com.

# Key 1:
# I Am Not Alone

I was born in the early sixties, the last of the baby boomers. The sexual revolution burst upon the world while I was a child. People were exploring their sexual boundaries by tearing those long established boundaries down. The increased effectiveness and availability of birth control made sexual activity outside the traditional norms of marriage seem, like, groovy baby.

By 1971, I was addicted to pornography. Perhaps addicted is too strong a word for an eight-year-old, but I was certainly headed in that direction; the effect that pornography had on me was every bit like a drug.

I don't remember the first pornographic magazine I ever saw, but in my suburban California neighborhood, every single father of every single friend had at least one pornographic magazine – often more – in his house. And I knew where they were kept. Mr. G. kept his in the cabinet under the master bathroom sink. Mr. W. kept his in the drawer of his nightstand. Mr. B. kept his in a trunk at the foot of his bed. Mr. C. kept his on the coffee table and in a huge pile in the hall closet. My friends and I spent hours studying these magazines, like college students studying for some sort of major exam. Or perhaps, more like students getting drunk on their favorite beer.

My parents on the other hand were different from my friends' parents. My parents did not keep pornography in our house (believe me, I looked). However, they viewed sexuality as this wonderful thing and normal activity and had a few intriguing sex manuals. In our home we often talked about issues related to human sexuality – sometimes even around the dinner table. Our parents went out of their way to teach us about the procreative process as well as social skills necessary to treat people of the opposite gender with respect and goodness. My parents' desire to instill in us a healthy sexual viewpoint was an uphill battle with me, however, because all the porn I was looking at next door was teaching me something completely different about sex and about girls. My parents were trying to teach me true concepts, while the pornography was seducing me with its lies. I liked what the porn was telling me more than what my parents were teaching.

My life became completely wound up around pornography, yet all the while I was attempting to appear like the good guy my parents wanted me to become. Life was a struggle of incongruity as I danced in and out of the secret darkness.

I won't relate all the ways I indulged in pornography as I grew up, nor all the ways I hid my behavior. Sometimes it took considerable effort to get the porn and it always took considerable effort to hide the evidence. But my addiction was so deeply imbedded that I was willing to go to great extremes to act out.

For example, when I was about 13 or 14, I had a neighborhood friend who enjoyed showing me where his father hid his adult magazines. One week his family went on vacation and I was asked to feed their cats and water their plants while they were gone. It was actually a big job because they had lots of plants to water. The cats were all outdoor cats and so were the plants, and I had no reason to go inside their house during the week. In fact, I had no key to get inside. However, every time I went into their yard, I checked the doors to see if I could find a way inside to look at that magical magazine in his father's drawer.

One day, delirious with my desire to enjoy some pornography, I climbed under their house through an exterior access grate into the crawl space. I wriggled on my belly, knees and elbows under their house across the jagged concrete and gravel. I climbed under air ducts and tried not to snap any dangling wires. I positioned myself directly under the master bedroom closet where there was a trap door and as I pushed up on the trap door, I discovered it was unlatched. A shoe fell on me as I pushed upward, and an entire shoe rack was knocked over as it sat atop the trap door. But I got in the room and was able to spend an hour with the magazine, escaping into my lust haze and masturbating in their master bathroom.

This is how crazy the addicted part of my brain is: I actually broke into a neighbor's house! I'm sure I left behind a trail of evidence with the knocked over shoe rack, but I was willing to risk any consequence to look through that magazine. I even prepared a detailed

yet implausible lie in case I was asked about the knocked-over shoe rack.

Since then, I have acted out in more extreme and more dangerous ways. When my brain was locked into pornography, I was transported to a different world. A world where I was accepted, approved, loved, and desired. It was not a world grounded in reality, responsibility or consequence. It was my own personal time, and it felt wonderful. Real life, with the academic and social pressures of school, and later the stresses and boredom of a professional career, literally disappeared. I engulfed myself in the pleasure of pornography, and I made a conscientious choice to do so.

The reason I enjoyed pornography so much was pretty simple: it felt good. It felt much better than the pressure I felt to fit in at school, the stress of homework, and the chores at home that constantly loomed over my head. Pornography, lust and masturbation swept all those concerns away.

To those of us who struggle with this addiction, pornography is pleasurable. Many addicts may be surprised to learn that there are millions of people in this world for whom pornography is not pleasurable. For many, it can be emotionally painful. They see it for what it is: The dehumanization of people for the purpose of satisfying someone else's sexual desires. They see it as degrading. They see it as repulsive. They see it as deeply, deeply disturbing. For them, it is a counterfeit for something beautiful and fulfilling.

Interestingly, there are times when many addicts also see pornography as disturbing – however, we don't usually come to this conclusion until after our binge. Only after we have thoroughly acted out, with our lustful cravings satisfied, do our eyes begin to see clearly enough to identify the true nature of pornography. Some addicts, in this moment of clarity, make great resolutions to never indulge again. They also sense greater wisdom and insight than they have enjoyed in the past and think, "This time my resolve will stick. I think I may be cured!" However, this perceived clarity is just as convoluted as our lust.

When we are in the chains of addiction, we don't view the world correctly at all. We think we suddenly "get it," but we almost never do. Our perceptions are still being dictated and shaped by what our addiction wants us to believe. Our addiction wants us to feel high.

After acting out we may reach a point where sex is temporarily incapable of making us feel high. Our addiction fills us with the nobility of false recovery, and this heightened state of resolve becomes our new high. We absolutely KNOW we will never act out again. Pornography disgusts us. Similarly for some religious addicts, walking a false path of premature repentance can bring about a sense of redemption that then becomes the new high. We are still high, only we're high on our own nobility, resolve and anticipated success.

But eventually, the drudgery of life brings about its realities and pains, and our resolve to never use porn again becomes less exciting. Our addiction knows where the real pleasure is to be found, our

addiction knows how to get us high again, and soon we return to the pornography.

I repeated this cycle for years: The pain of life led me to seek solace in lust and porn. It brought pleasure for a while. But then the pain and emptiness of acting out would outweigh the pleasure of acting out. I'd resolve not to act out and feel redeemed. But in reality I had not changed much, and when the world threw its obstacles in my path, I was still susceptible to the enticement of porn and would find myself acting out again.

Eventually, I got married and hoped that marriage would solve the problem. But despite the fact that I am married to a woman whom I still regard as the most beautiful woman on the planet, she was not what my addiction needed – my addiction needed something to instantaneously satisfy my every sexual inclination. Since my wife had too much self-esteem for that, only pornography seemed to meet the need. Within six months of marriage I had returned to acting out. (I'll talk more about marriage later, but I will say that I disclosed to my wife before she discovered my addiction – actually, before we were married. I confessed much and she was deeply hurt but committed to supporting my efforts to recover.)

The Internet came into my life a few years after marriage, and it added rocket fuel to my addiction. I was so distraught. Despite all my best efforts, things kept getting worse and worse and worse. I signed up for a therapist.

In therapy I learned a few techniques that seemed helpful. After a year or so of therapy, I was sensing some improvements in my life. I was experiencing success in abstaining from porn. I was at least staying sober longer than I ever had in the past.

And then I did something that – well, looking back I have to wonder what got into me. I wrote an essay about pornography addiction and I posted it online. That was the first incarnation of No-porn.com. Something unexpected happened: I began to get emails from people who had read the article. They told me how helpful it was for them. They told me they were succeeding at sobriety for the first time in their lives. They expressed tremendous gratitude for that little article.

Early on at No-porn.com, I set up a survey. I asked people if they considered themselves to be addicted to pornography. I asked at what age they first got hooked on porn. I asked if they considered themselves religious. Over 5,000 people responded to the survey.

The single most startling response in the survey was to the question, "Who was the first person you told about your addiction?" A few people said their spouse, some said a friend, some said a religious leader – but the overwhelming majority (and remember, many of these self-identified addicts said they first got hooked before the age of 12) – the overwhelming majority, in fact 57%, said they had NEVER TOLD ANYONE! No wonder the addiction was winning. We were all living a secret lie, desperate to stop, overwhelmed by our compulsive behaviors and feeling more and more isolated every time we acted out. We felt

more and more helpless. For many of us, this secret addiction had been destroying our lives for decades!

I began to find friends in recovery. For the first time, we were all discovering that we weren't the only ones who wanted desperately to stop looking at porn, but who felt powerless to do so. I became a hundred times more committed to abstaining. I was still slipping on occasion, but I felt that if I was really going to help other people stay sober, I needed to stay sober. I noticed that my efforts to help others were indeed helping me. I began reading everything I could on addiction. I began attending Sexaholics Anonymous meetings. I made friends there who were struggling with all forms of sex addiction, including pornography and masturbation.

When I first heard about sexual addiction recovery groups, they were described to me as being for people whose acting out behavior went well beyond just pornography and masturbation. It seemed to me that I wasn't qualified to participate in such a group, and perhaps at that time, before the Internet, there weren't many group participants whose behavior was limited to pornography and masturbation. However, these days, many participants are struggling strictly with porn and masturbation. (12-Step contact information is available at the end of this chapter.)

I should note that I know many porn addicts who do not worry about abstaining from masturbation. That is not the issue for them. They just want out of the porn. That is a choice each of us must make for ourselves. My own recovery depended on abstaining from both porn

and masturbation; for me, the two have been indelibly linked in my brain; one always led to the other and vice versa.

As the Internet has made pornography more accessible, more options for treatment and recovery are also being developed. More professionals are specializing in treatment for this disorder, and 12-step and other groups are welcoming those seeking help from this form of sex addiction.

Eventually, I came to know a truth about myself that I had wanted to know for decades: I will never use porn or masturbate again.

This book explores some of the things I had to learn before I came to know that I will never use again, and I'm going to share those experiences and ideas with you. But one of the first truths I had to realize before recovery was possible was that I wasn't alone. Millions struggle with this addiction.

I think that is why so many people responded strongly to the article I wrote for my website – it wasn't that the plan was fool proof; in fact, these days I consider it somewhat naïve. I keep it posted online, however, because so many people do seem to find their first steps toward recovery when they read it. I think that's because the first thing that article does is express a voice of understanding and tells so many addicts for the first time, "You are not alone. Many people, people you would never expect, struggle with this addiction."

A couple of years after I started No-porn.com, I added a message board called the Support Board. Immediately, hundreds of people were signing up. Many have long-term sobriety. Many who gain sobriety move on, but many stay to encourage others to never give up on their quest for recovery. For many of us, it is this process of helping others – what 12-step groups call the Twelfth Step – that really helps us maintain long-term sobriety. There is also a board for the partners of addicts to support one another as they deal with the pain and humiliation and betrayal of their loved ones' porn addiction.

So my first suggestion to encourage your recovery is that if you haven't disclosed your addiction, do so. But do so wisely. The Sexaholics Anonymous White Book offers this counsel about disclosing to your spouse or another loved one:

> *We suggest that newcomers to Sexaholics Anonymous not reveal their sexual past to a spouse or family member who does not already know of it, without careful consideration and a period of sexual sobriety, and even then, only after prior discussion with an SA sponsor or group. Typically, when we come into the program, we want to share our excitement with those closest to us and tell all right away. Such disclosures might injure our family or others and should be confined to the group of which we are a part until a wise course is indicated. Of course, if there is any chance we have put others in danger, we take immediate steps to try to correct that.*
>
> *Few things can so damage the possibility of healing in the family as a premature confession to spouse or family where sacred bonds and trust have been violated. Unwittingly, such confessions can be attempts on our part to dump our guilt, get back into good graces, or make just another show of willpower. Great caution is advised here.*
>
> *Amends to family must begin with a sexually sober, changed attitude and behavior on a daily basis. Then, as we grow in recovery, we will find how to make direct amends. Help from sponsor and group*

*is indispensable here. There's always a way, if we really want to make things right. ("Sexaholics Anonymous" p. 3, 1989)*

I have come to understand the wisdom of this statement. Although I have already mentioned that I confessed to my wife prior to our marriage, I did so carefully and in consultation with a religious leader who offered me wise insights on how to go about it. The SA White Book doesn't say, "Don't disclose," but it offers wise guidance. There was a point in my marriage where I would confess to my wife every time I had a slip. But it wasn't a humble, repentant confession – it qualified more as "guilt dumping." I'd let the guilt eat at me until I couldn't take it any more. I'd tell my wife, and I'd feel a lot better. Of course, she felt like garbage, but I felt better, and that was all my addiction cared about: Feeling better.

I suggest that you begin by connecting with other addicts who are in recovery. The Support Board at No-porn.com is a great way to do this. There are other online discussions as well that a simple internet search may find for you. Or you might think about attending a group meeting for face-to-face support.

This process of disclosure and sharing with others has been a tremendous help for me. It has helped me to identify the illogical and harmful thinking and outright lies that the addictive voice in my brain kept feeding me. Hearing myself write and speak about my struggles made it easier when temptations came. I hope you will find a way to disclose and reach out to others without destroying relationships that may still be salvageable.

If you are interested in looking into support groups, here is a list of resources that might be helpful:

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA)
www.slaafws.org
210-828-7900

Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA)
www.sexaa.org
P.O. Box 70949
Houston, TX 77270
(713) 869-4902 or (800) 477-8191

Sexaholics Anonymous (SA)
www.sa.org
P.O. Box 3565
Brentwood, TN 37024
(615) 370-6062 or (866) 424-8777

Sexual Compulsives Anonymous (SCA)
www.sca-recovery.org
Old Chelsea Station, PO Box 1585
New York, NY 10011
(212) 439-1123 or (800) 977-HEAL

Codependents of Sex Addicts (COSA)
www.cosa-recovery.org
PO Box 14537
Minneapolis MN 55414
(763) 537-6904

S-ANON
www.sanon.org
P.O. Box 111242
Nashville, TN 37222-1242
(800) 210-8141 or (615) 833-3152

Recovering Couples Anonymous (RCA)
www.recovering-couples.org
P.O. Box 11029
Oakland CA 94611
(510) 663-2312

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
www.aa.org
P.O. Box 459,
New York, NY 10163
(212) 870-3400

## Key 2:
## I Am Not My Addiction

A member of the No-porn.com Support Board recently identified an indicator of sexual addiction. You might have an addiction, he wrote, if "you want to stop, but can't." I made a distinction that I think is important: You might have an addiction if you want to stop, but you *don't* want to stop and believe you can't. Jack Trimpey, in his book on alcohol and drug addiction *Rational Recovery*, presents a model for addiction that I have adapted in my own recovery from sexual addiction. He talks about ambiguity as the defining characteristic of addiction. If you look at porn 13 hours a day, seven days a week, it only makes you a porn user, not an addict. If you are dependent on porn, if you can't sleep until you've had your fix, if you can't cope with any of life's problems and turn to porn to escape from life, then you are merely a pornography-dependent person. You don't have an addiction until you want to stop, but are unable to stop because part of you wants to keep using, and your personal experience seems to indicate that you can't stop. It's the ambiguity – the desire to stop AND the desire not to stop, and the feeling that you can't stop – that distinguishes addiction.

I recommend Trimpey's book, although I must mention that Mr. Trimpey is adamantly opposed to 12-step recovery programs. He claims they are a crutch to recovery, set up to fail in nearly every case. This may be true for substance recovery, or it may not be; however I

would not make such an assertion regarding sexual addiction recovery programs.

My personal experience in 12-step groups for sex addiction was beneficial. In the 12-step program I gained a network of fellow sufferers whom I could call in crisis, which was critical for me. I also gained tremendous value from discussing my challenges and daily temptations with my fellows. For me, however, the burdens that others brought to the rooms began to weigh me down. Hearing the details (although not overly graphic) of how people acted out began to depress me. In addition, I never truly overcame my tendency to judge others, to compare myself to others and think, "Well, at least my acting out behavior isn't as bad as his," and I was led to believe that I couldn't recover until I overcame my judgmental attitudes. In reality, I could recover just fine as long as I was willing to abstain. Eventually, I left the 12-step program knowing that I still needed accountability partners to report to and opportunities to share my experiences with others. The board at No-porn.com has provided that venue, and I still make regular phone calls.

I learned a lot about addiction in my 12-step program, and I learned a lot about addiction elsewhere. I would not tell anyone not to participate in a 12-step group; however, I would also not insist that it is the only way they will recover, which some 12-step participants seem to believe.

The addiction model that Jack Trimpey proposes is excellent. While I did not agree with everything he wrote, I certainly gained life-

altering insights into my own addiction. Many of the ideas in this chapter are adapted from his book.

I remember in high school biology learning about the brain. The brain has two major parts that function in different ways. (If you're a neuroscientist, and I get some of my facts wrong here, forgive me; it is the addiction model I want to concentrate on, not the biology). There is a part of the brain called the midbrain that controls all of the basic survival instincts. This part of the brain sitting atop your spinal chord isn't very large, and it regulates subconscious behaviors such as breathing and pumping blood. It includes the survival instincts – the fight or flight response, so to speak – and it is the pleasure center, including those activities it deems essential for survival of the species, such as eating and sex. This part of the brain is the animal brain; it is like a dog's brain and it gets our body to do things by associating pleasure to certain activities.

This is the part of the brain where our addiction lives. I think of my addiction as a beast living in a cage in this part of my brain.

Then there is the cerebral cortex. It is that large, spongy looking part of your brain that makes you uniquely human. It controls all of your higher thoughts. It is the rational brain, capable of making complex decisions such as postponing gratification and making sacrifices for long term happiness or the greater good. It is creative. This is the part of the brain that really defines who you are. The beast doesn't live in this part of your brain.

We have an addiction when the beast in the midbrain gets used to having its way, and you, thinking the addictive voice is coming from your cerebral cortex rather than your midbrain, permit it. Even though you know you want to stop, and should stop, you hear the beast's voice communicating to your cerebral cortex, rationalizing with it, and soon you adapt the same perspective as your addiction beast.

The beast is a great ventriloquist. In fact, it is an amazing ventriloquist. It depends on ventriloquism – the ability to make its voice appear to come from someplace else – because it can never physically move to your cerebral cortex. Sitting down there in your midbrain, it throws its voice up to the cerebral cortex and says something like, "I really deserve to spend an hour looking at porn right now," and you think that it is actually YOU thinking this. Since you thought the thought (you think), you think you must be right – at least you think so… maybe you're wrong and you wonder: "Why do I deserve an hour of porn right now?"

"Because I've just spent so much time living without sex," says the beast hiding in your head, "and I've been working so hard. I really need something to help me relax. Everyone needs a sexual release. Besides, it won't hurt anybody if I do." Now you're debating with yourself, which is usually a pretty useless endeavor.

Notice that in this example, the beast speaks in the first person. And why not? He's in charge isn't he? When your beast is speaking in first person, watch out; he has really taken over.

I've noticed that when people start experiencing some sobriety, the beast often shifts to the second person. This is a good sign, but it is also a dangerous warning: the beast has started to get hungry. It is easier to recognize when it says something like "You need porn right now. You are really horny and there's porn just a mouse click away." However, your addiction is smart and it will sometimes disguise its appearance when it speaks in the second person. Because your addiction becomes easier to recognize, it may adapt the fantasy image of someone you might lust over. It's a little harder to resist when this fantasy person is the one saying to you, "You really deserve some porn right now."

However, when your addictive voice starts talking to you, you can recognize it as your addictive voice talking, not the real you. The most powerful impact of this model of addiction – a voice trying to convince you to act out – is that when you recognize the voice, and identify the voice, the voice loses its ability to trick or control you. It might try to argue a bit with you, but it is seriously weakened.

When I first began to recognize my addiction as a voice separate from me and to identify it as a beast, the beast was easier to ignore. I might notice an attractive woman on the street. If the beast tries to get me to fantasize about meeting that woman and her wanting me in a romantic or sexual way, I just say, "Aha, beast activity!" and the beast whimpers back to its corner.

Your addictive voice is any thought, idea, emotion or impulse that tries to get you to act out sexually. Recognize it for what it is. It

isn't you. You are not your addiction. Picture it as a ferocious, desperate, selfish, evil, snarling beast. You can get it back in its cage down there in the midbrain just by recognizing it. Refuse to feed it and it starves. As it starves, it gets weaker and weaker. Even if it takes the rest of your life to die, remembering what it is, who you are, and that you get to decide what behaviors you will and will not engage in will determine whether the beast starves miserably or regains its strength.

The beast cares about one thing: its pleasure. The beast doesn't understand consequences, and wouldn't care if it did. The beast doesn't understand that if acting out got you arrested and thrown into jail, that you'd be miserable. It doesn't care about you anyway. It wants pleasure now. Why? Because it only understands Now. It has no sense of time. It has no sense of tomorrow and the destruction you will bring down in your life. My friend who I mentioned in the introduction was disciplined at work for looking at porn. He understood for years that he could possibly lose his job if he were caught. But the beast didn't understand that and didn't care either. The beast only cared about looking at porn Now.

Because your beast has no sense of time, it can be surprisingly patient. You recognize the addictive voice – a lustful thought or desire – and it shuts up. But it is waiting. Trimpey argues that the "One Day at a Time" approach that 12-step groups recommend encourages the beast's patience. Because one day at a time makes no long term promises, the beast is willing to wait.

Because the beast only recognizes the Now, I have found a phrase to throw back at the beast whenever I hear my addictive voice mumbling. I identify my addictive voice and respond, "I never use porn or masturbate now." This simple phrase, directed at my addictive voice weakens the beast and strengthens me. Every time the addictive voice throws something at me, I simply remind it that I never use porn or masturbate now. It understands because it understands "Now." It also understands "Never." I Never use porn or masturbate Now.

Never. I never use porn or masturbate now. What happened in the past is irrelevant. As Tony Robbins is fond of saying, the past does not equal the present or the future. What my beast needs to understand is that I never use porn or masturbate now.

I'm concerned about how you might be responding to this statement, "I never use porn or masturbate now." I know how your beast is responding. Your beast is responding that this will never work. Your beast is responding that you can't trick it with a simple phrase. Your beast is responding you've tried a hundred different things and have always failed, so how would some little phrase help? By Magic? That's how your beast is responding, but how are you responding? Do you believe your beast?

*Any* thought or idea that tells you that you can't stop, that you will use again, is your addictive voice. Recognize it. Feel it resist the fact that you Never use porn or masturbate Now. Your beast is probably getting pretty enraged. Listen to its rant. Listen to its arguments. Now, tell it again, "I never use porn or masturbate now."

Let the beast rage on. When I was a kid, I loved a television cartoon called Scooby-Doo Mysteries, about a crime solving dog and his whacky teenage friends. At the end of each show, the kids pull the mask off of some monster to reveal who the criminal really is. You've just done that… only the mask you pulled off looks just like you. And beneath the mask, you've just revealed a real monster. A monster who hates you. However, you now get to send it off to jail. "If it hadn't been for this meddlesome book…"

Unfortunately, the cage for your beast is in your own brain. The addictive voice can't be completely removed, and it is going to continue to whimper and whine and scream and rage, perhaps for the rest of your life. But its power is going to diminish. Every time you recognize your addictive voice for what it is, every time you tell your addictive voice that you never use porn or masturbate now, the beast grows weaker.

In most cases, recognizing the addictive voice early on will keep you far away from danger. There will be times, however, when your beast may rage up against you and really get you to walk along the edge of the cliff, hoping for a chance to push you off. You may have experienced this sense of delirium before – when the beast has convinced you that you will act out and nothing will stop you. At times like that, all you can hear is the beast screaming in your head – and you may not even recognize the words in your brain as coming from your addictive voice. It feels very much like it is you – your wants, your needs, your rage – that is driving you closer and closer to acting out.

How do you deal with that kind of heavy, impulsive, powerful compulsion when you have forgotten that you never use pornography now? Is that what you're worried about? If so, then perhaps you haven't convinced yourself that you never use porn or masturbate now. Go back to your plan, your new vision that you never use porn or masturbate now. If that's your reaction every time the addictive voice raises its head, then you won't get to the point where you feel like you don't have a choice.

However, if you stop recognizing the addictive voice, and you find yourself getting ready to step over the edge of the cliff, there are a few things you can do to get back on track. First, get away from the source of porn. Turn off the computer, turn off the television, leave the liquor store – where ever you are, get away from it physically. Second, rub an overly ripe banana in your hair. Third, what the heck am I recommending rubbing a banana in your hair for?? I say that actually as an illustration of radically changing your emotional state. To get cooled down, your mood has to change. Some people recommend prayer, some recommend rubbing a banana in your hair, or anything that is going to alter your emotions away from lust. When I travel on business, I always carry home photos and movies with me. Whenever the addictive voice starts to turn my thinking toward pornography – and many people are susceptible to acting out when they are away from home on business trips – I enjoy the family videos and photographs. This allows me to ground my emotions away from fantasy, and back toward something I value deeply. Music can also have a powerful impact on my mood. If I sing along, I am generally

carried mentally away from the pornography. Reading books that carry a positive message also help me center myself. Some self-help books or books of a spiritual nature can reduce my willingness to listen to my addictive voice.

Once I remove my access to the pornography, once I get my mood altered (if only slightly), I try to connect in a positive way with another person. Whether it is a family member or an accountability partner, I try simply to have a conversation. This sense of connection often addresses the psychological needs that were deprived enough to cause me to heed my addictive voice.

As I begin to calm down from my close call, it is likely that I'll have to put myself back in the situation where I became weak in the first place. For instance, if I went for a walk to get away from my hotel room, I will still need to return to the room. This may prove a difficult challenge if the addictive voice continues to whine and refuses to shut up. It may be saying things like, "Look, you're never going to win this battle, so you might as well give up."

Hopefully, by now, I have grounded myself enough to begin reminding the addictive voice that, "I never use porn or masturbate now." If not, maybe it is time for another banana in the head. Sometimes it is just going to be a long night. But just lying there, white knuckling your way through temptation isn't going to solve the problem. Actively work on your recovery in these times of challenge. Read relevant information, talk back to your beast, connect with other

people in healthy ways – perhaps performing some secret act of service. Pray if so inclined. Exercise.

I remember one night, feeling resentful toward my wife because she wasn't in the mood to make love, and I was in the mood for sex (note the distinction). I lay in bed thinking about how this addiction was so frustrating and I began to think about the misery it had caused in my life. I went down to the basement and began to bounce on a mini-trampoline we had down there. As I bounced, I prayed. And I prayed in anger, swearing at God, and expressing my rage and frustration at this damned addiction. I kept bouncing up and down, jumping hard each time. "I am so f-ing tired of this f-ing addiction," I prayed, though I didn't censor my words. I don't imagine God approves of such language, but I didn't know at that time how else to express my feelings about the addiction.

The anger eventually lessened and I began to even see some humor in my jumping up and down in my pajamas. And then I began to realize, I'm not acting out. I'm not acting out. And I realized, "I don't care how miserable I am, or how long my night is, or how tired I am tomorrow. Tonight I am sober." And I actually began to feel some joy. I guess God even answers prayers with profanity in them.

Another night, under similar circumstances, I began to feel anger and resentment about being addicted, and I went downstairs and watched television (we have a very safe television in our house). My wife came downstairs about 30 minutes later in tears. She said, "I hate it when you get this way. If I won't have sex with you, you toss

and turn and pout, and then leave!" We spoke some more and she said, "You treat me as if I'm letting you down!"

"You think I'm down here because of how I feel about YOU?" I asked, surprised. "Yes, I can't sleep; Yes, I was disappointed we didn't make love. But I'm not down here resenting YOU! I'm down here resenting ME and this miserable ADDICTION. I hate this. I hate that I feel this way. I know this resentment makes me toss and turn and keep you awake so I leave. I'm sorry, so sorry…" and we continued to talk. I was so grateful she came down to let me know how she was interpreting my behavior. Wonderfully, talking helped me feel a connection and I was able to return to bed and go to sleep quickly.

It was shortly after that that I began to learn about the addictive voice and how to recognize and dilute it.

I hate my addiction. But I recognize it for what it is: A voice in my head that tries to control me. I can retake control simply by recognizing it. I hate my addiction and it hates me. It doesn't care anything about me. It would rather see me die than deprive it of its porn.

It became clear to me just how much my addiction doesn't care about me one evening when I was driving home. As I crawled along through bumper to bumper traffic, I began to think of a woman whom I had a positive working relationship with, and who was also very attractive. As I drove along, my mind began to fantasize that my wife died of cancer, and I imagined what it would be like to date this co-

worker, and to quickly marry and settle down with her. And then, as I recognized that this was my addictive voice at work, it dawned on me just how much my addictive Beast hated me, my wife, and everything that brings me joy. It would willingly wish cancer upon my wife, leave my children to lose the only mother they will ever have, and have me date a near stranger without truly mourning the deepest loss of my life. My addiction hates me. I went numb. I sat in the car, understanding just a little better how much my addiction truly hates me. I silenced It quickly ("I never use porn or masturbate now") and spent the rest of my commute trying to conceive of the pain the loss of my wife would cause. While I wept, I knew I was only scratching the surface of the pain such a loss would bring.

This is how much your addiction hates you. It would deprive you of grief, it would deprive you of experiencing the emotions associated with your deepest sorrows, it would deprive you of experiencing life, just to get high on lust. It doesn't value you, and it would rather see you die than for it to be deprived of the pleasure of acting out. Don't let your addictive voice, that snarling, manipulative, and cunning beast, tell you how to live your life. Living the way your Beast tells you isn't really living at all.

## Key 3:

## Pain, Not Porn, is Part of Any Happy Life

When we over-analyze ourselves, we may have a tendency to miss the mark. What good does nitpicking all the potential causes of our addiction do? Although we have had many hardships in our lives, and may say things to ourselves like, "I was deprived of love as a child; I was beat up by the neighborhood bullies; I was an abused child; my parents were too puritanical; I was taught that sex is evil; I was taught that sex was awesome" – while all or some of these may be true in our lives, they aren't really the cause of our addiction.

The cause of our addiction is our desire for pleasure. Somewhere along the line, we made a choice to experience pleasure when things became uncomfortable.

My addiction hates pain. It hates it – especially emotional pain, which is ironic since ultimately the greatest emotional pain I've experienced was as a result of my addiction. But there are many things my addiction interprets as painful. They're not entirely unique to me, but what I think of as painful, you may actually thrive on. For me, the three things that my addiction sees as most painful and tries to numb through lust are boredom, loneliness, and pressure at work. Those are my big three, but there are other issues as well.

When I feel inclined to act out, when my addiction starts banging the bars of its cage, it is always helpful for me to pause and evaluate what it is that I am experiencing that my addiction is trying to numb.

There are two types of pain that affect my addiction. First, there is short term, temporary pain. For example, a slow, boring day at work might stir things up inside my head. Or a business trip contributing to my sense of loneliness can lead me to seek connections (*mis-connections)* through porn that are ultimately unfulfilling. Both of these are pains that will pass if I can just hold on.

The second type of pain is more deeply rooted. I think of this pain as long term, although it is not necessarily permanent. It is the type of pain that doesn't go away in a few hours or days. Although its intensity might ebb and flow, it is always there, either affecting everything we think, feel and do, or hiding in the corner of our brains.

I'll be honest; I have two different attitudes about pain. When things are going well, when I haven't been interested in acting out for a long while, I think, "What benefit is there to evaluating pain?" I refer to those who say that unless we deal with the core issues, the deeply rooted pains, we will never truly recover. In these periods of happiness, I adopt the philosophy that dealing with the root causes is not essential to recovery. I say to myself that these deep rooted problems should not be excuses for acting out, and one can remain sober without obsessing about the past and without victimizing him or herself.

However, on those days when the addiction rages, on those days when I find myself turning around to look back at Sodom and Gomorrah, and when the only thing I can seem to think about is the *possibility* of acting out in some subtle and justifiable way, I find that it is helpful to pause and identify what is going on in my head.

I think of "pause" as an action word. By pause, I mean change my environment and change my perspective in order to change my desires.

Change of Environment: Changing my environment can help to clear my head. If I'm at work, I try to step outside for a minute or two if the day is nice. Or at least walk down the hall and speak with a colleague. This helps get me outside of my head. If I'm home alone or watching the kids for the night, stepping away from the computer or going out to sit on the front steps can also help to clear my addictive thoughts.

Change of Perspective: Now that I'm sitting out on the front steps, it is helpful for me to contemplate what pains I am currently experiencing that are leading me to addictive thoughts. Honestly, I hate to do this; it is not pleasant. Usually, when I first start thinking about these pains in my life (e.g., loneliness, boredom), my thinking is usually a confirmation of my pain: "Yep, I'm bored. I'm always bored. My life sucks. I'm never going to get past this. I'm always going to want to act out if I'm always going to feel this dissatisfied with life!" However, as I continue to chew on the source of the pain, I have learned to ask myself three questions:

- "Do I honestly think this pain will *never* end?"
- "Can I think of a time recently when I didn't feel this way?"
- "Would acting out really make my problem go away?"

As I ponder these three questions, other thoughts and ideas begin to surface. Often I become aware of some step I can take to make the temptation diminish. If that happens, I make sure to take that step immediately. In addition, by thinking of a time when I was more content, I usually replace painful feelings of dread with memories of joy. As my emotional state begins to change, I become more reasoned in my ability to make choices. I am more capable of putting strong, emotional urges and incessant addictive voices behind me. I am able to remind myself that "I never use porn or masturbate now."

However, it is the third question that is fundamentally critical to my recovery: "Would acting out really make my problem go away?" My addictive voice thrives only in the Now. And in the Now, if there is only pain, it begs to act out. It has a remarkable ability to forget the consequences of my past addictive behavior. The reality is that after acting out I usually felt worse than I did before. Acting out has only intensified my feelings of worthlessness, powerlessness and hopelessness. I admit, in the past, I might have chosen to act out even after having considered the fact that pornography made things worse. "I don't care if it doesn't make my problems go away," I'd defiantly declare, "I'm going to look at porn anyway." My addictive voice had completely taken over. However, I have since learned some things

about pain that have made it easier to quiet my addictive voice's ranting and demands.

Pain is part of life. It is part of the lives of the happiest of people. Those who are happiest have learned how to respond to pain in ways that are healthy and empowering, but those of use with addictions have learned to avoid pain. As I mentioned, one of my most troubling pains was loneliness. When I was young, I kept waiting for romantic love to come into my life and end my loneliness. Masturbation seemed to momentarily mask my emotional isolation with synthetic love, but after the excitement passed – and it passed quickly – the experience only reinforced my loneliness and left me more distraught than before.

Regardless of its source, pain is unavoidable. We are either going to increase our pain by trying to avoid it, or deal with our pain in a way that allows us to grow stronger – and happier. As a person addicted to porn, my life's journey becomes learning to deal with discomfort, pain and sorrow in ways that increase my joy, rather than diminish it. Acting out, in the end, only destroys any chance I have at real happiness.

I now celebrate the fact that I can actually feel and endure pain without the drug of lust. Even now, I can have a sleepless night and hear my addictive voice screaming, "If you'd just look at some porn and masturbate, you'd be able to relax. You wouldn't feel lonely. You'd find contentment and be able to sleep." I don't debate the beast. Rather than arguing with the beast, trying to remind it that in the past if I

started to look at porn I'd stay up all night anyway and by dawn feel lonelier than ever, I shut it up instead. Rather than engaging my addiction in debate, I acknowledge, "My addiction is very active tonight. However, more important than sleep is sobriety. I don't care if I'm awake all night; I am going to enjoy this victory over my addiction. I celebrate that I can actually feel this frustrated with my insomnia. I celebrate that I can feel this loneliness. I celebrate that I can actually ***feel*** without trying to alter my mood with porn."

## Key 4:
## All Sex Addiction Feeds on Lust

When I was actively engaged in acting out, I found myself frequently filled with resentment. If things didn't go my way, I'd carry a grudge. I was most resentful about sex. If my spouse was not meeting my warped sexual expectations, I would hold it against her. I'd often begin my little pouty dance, tossing and turning in bed, signaling to my wife that she was a complete failure as a lover. I'd sigh, I'd whine, I'd refuse to sleep just so I could say to my wife, "I couldn't sleep at all last night and it was all your fault for not having sex with me."

For me, resentment is a tinderbox. It is a can of gasoline. Lust is the spark. If I've built up a supply of resentment, it only takes a tiny bit of lust to spark a blazing inferno, a complete binge of porn and masturbation that can last for days.

There are all kinds of ways that sex addicts act out. Whether it is pornography on the computer or snorting coke with a prostitute, all sexual acting out is rooted in lust. Lust is more than just identifying someone as physically attractive; it is seeking to take something from that person. Lust drinks through the eyes, and seeks to take something of a person's spirit, to possess or control it. Lust often seems to seek some level of acknowledgment, recognition and approval. When I lust after another person, what I often really want is to be lusted after instead. I am hoping that when I glance over at that attractive woman,

that she will be glancing back at me, lusting after me. It's not the same thing for many lust addicts, but that is how it works for me. My fantasy is not that that person and I are having sex; my fantasy, rather, is that ***that*** person is fantasizing that she and I are having sex.

For many years as I attempted to recover, I avoided interaction with attractive females because my brain was so doped up on lust that I couldn't connect with them as people. My addiction always acknowledged a pretty woman as something to be lusted after rather than loved as a human being. I wasn't being harassing or overtly rude to them; I wasn't flirting and such. Rather, in my head, I was trying to possess them, which meant I was *miss*-connecting with them, rather than connecting. I believe that real joy in this life comes when we are capable of loving all good people. Lust is merely a counterfeit to love. It sexualizes people and it takes rather than gives.

I once heard a man who was sincerely trying to recover talk about a "lust object" he had recently seen. It took me a while to figure out what he was talking about. Over time, I realized that he habitually referred to people he lusted over as "lust objects." I wanted to say to this man that I did not think referring to physically attractive women as lust objects was actually helpful for recovery. Thinking of a person as a lust object is really no different than lusting after them. It is demeaning and reemphasizes the sexualization of a human being.

Lust, again, is a counterfeit connection with a human being. Love is a true connection. I have one true love, my wife, whom I will adore and cherish forever. She is the only person with whom I will

have a sexual relationship. Yet, I can love all people. At least all the good people, and I suppose in some Biblical way, I can even learn to love my enemies, although I'm not yet sure what that would require. For now, I find it challenging enough to love just the good people. So, I continue to work on that. I'll save my enemies for another day.

For addicts, letting go of lust is sublimely difficult. And yet, as we learn to look beyond body parts, we can discover the greatness of an individual's individuality. We see his or her heart. We learn to love.

Learning to love is such an important concept. It is an emotion and it is an action. The emotion is felt through our caring and interest in all people, regardless of appearances. And love is demonstrated when we take action to serve other people, and to make the world a better place.

Service is a powerful tool. There is something that happens when we serve another human being, even if we are deeply buried in our addictive behaviors. Reaching out to another person, sacrificing time and energy, momentarily shedding our selfishness, we connect. We step away from the beast in our brain, and lift a fellow human being to a slightly higher station. And, through some cosmic law of spiritual physics, we lift ourselves at the same time.

Service may not cure our addiction in and of itself, but as I became serious about my own recovery, I discovered that if I reached out to others and gave something of myself, rather than try to take something from someone else through lust, I began to see through the

fog of my drug. That improved vision enabled me to alter my perspective from selfishness to selflessness, and that is a powerful motivator toward sobriety.

With an attitude altered through service, I could understand just a bit more that my acting out was not a good thing. I could see that I was not living up to my human potential and I realized that maybe I could make more of an effort to live free of pornography.

Many of the partners of addicts who post on the No-porn.com Support Board talk about their husbands' efforts to overcome their addiction. And while their husbands struggle and frequently fail, they can still see their husbands' determination to become a better person. Others talk about their husbands' unwillingness to even acknowledge that pornography is a problem. I would assume that those addicts who are just sitting on the couch, channel surfing until they get their next urge to "pornsturbate" (as some of the partners on our Support Board call it) are not inclined to step out of their way to be of real service.

But once in a while, we all find ourselves serving someone – even those who have no intention of giving up pornography. If you live with someone like that, may I make a suggestion? If you've already tried this, and it hasn't worked yet, you might want to keep trying. If you have tried it for years and have seen no improvement, then I'm sorry and I encourage you to find another approach. But I suggest you help your addicted husband or boyfriend identify the feelings that come through service and compare them with the feelings that come from selfishness. We addicts are not always the most aware of our feelings,

unless those feelings involve lust. If your husband pulls over to help a stranger change a tire, when he's done, ask him how he feels. After he answers, tell him how proud you are of him for helping someone. If you catch him looking at porn, ask him how he feels. After he answers, tell him how you feel. Instead of engaging him in a battle that only forces him to justify his terrible behavior, ask him how he feels and leave it at that, and on occasion, remind him how his actions – good or bad – make you feel. I can't promise you he will decide to change, but before he has any chance of changing, he's going to have to learn to distinguish between the joyful feelings of really connecting with other people through service and love, and the empty feelings of disconnecting through pornography and lust.

Service is an act of love. An addict may have trouble feeling the warmth that comes from such an act because compared to the intensity of an orgasm, or the endorphins generated by pornography, the gentle joy of kindness has trouble rising above the commotion and excitement to get noticed. So as addicts, we need to pause and pat ourselves on the back when we do something good. We need to realize that we have just done something loving. Hopefully, this will strengthen our resolve when our Addictive Voice begins to pout and moan and beg for food. Hopefully, building a tradition of serving others will help us remember at the conscious and the subconscious levels that, "I never use porn or masturbate now."

However, when we do something for another person, we need to feel the joy of the act itself, and not expect others to acknowledge our efforts. This is more than just some altruistic theological principle. We

run a real risk when we do something for someone else and then slink off to our corner pouting, "They don't appreciate me." In many cases, the person we are serving might be a wife whom we have spent years hurting through our behavior. That person may be so damaged that it is truly difficult for her to even notice an act of kindness, or she may have grave suspicions about our motives – perhaps we're trying to make up for some recent, secret acting out.

When we start to feel disappointed in someone for failing to acknowledge how we have served him or her, we run a serious risk of becoming resentful. As I have mentioned, resentment is a fuel easily ignited by the spark of lust.

If we let feelings of being unappreciated turn to resentment, we risk doing more damage than we can repair. Sometimes, when I feel like my wife isn't acknowledging my service, rather than pouting and letting my resentment build, I simply ask her in good humor, "Was it helpful when I swept the floor?" To which she always replies, "Yes!" I don't really ask her just for the strokes; rather, I ask her knowing that I might begin to feel unappreciated and resentful if I don't. So I ask her with a smile on my face. And then, when she says "Yes," I go ahead and help with something else. It isn't an intentional ploy, but I have observed this pattern: I do something around the house, and if she fails to acknowledge my help, I ask her if I've been helpful. When she says yes, I feel motivated to be even more helpful, which makes her more likely to acknowledge my help.

I don't mention these particular acts of service in the house to insinuate that sweeping the floor or doing dishes or other chores are my wife's responsibility alone. We view them as both our responsibility, but even when you are doing something that has to be done, and it is your responsibility to do it, fulfilling those responsibilities can be acts of service to others. Sweeping isn't my wife's chore, but when I do it, it is helpful to her. When she does it, it is helpful to me, and I try my best to acknowledge all the work she accomplishes both in and out of the home.

Just as lust can kill love, the antidote to lust is love. Learning to love, which is both an emotional feeling and acts of service, helps clear the haze of our drug-lust. As we begin to step down from the high of acting out, we begin to see for the first time how much pain and suffering we have caused.

We must learn to serve, then, without keeping count and without expecting recognition. What we gain from our acts of love is far more important and significant than the mere gratification of recognition. Through selfless acts of service, I believe we gain power – the kind of power that helps us regain our ability to make choices that take us away from lust.

## Key 5:

## Porn DOES hurt people

Many years ago, my wife and I sought the professional advice of a family therapist to help us deal with issues that one of our children was having. Over the course of several weeks, the conversations focused less on our daughter and more on our marriage. Eventually, we brought up my addiction. At that time I was acting out two or three times a year, and I thought I was doing pretty well.

The therapist asked my wife how she felt when I looked at pornography or chatted online with strangers. My wife got very quiet. She sat very still. I started to feel my skin get hot as I imagined all the horrible things my wife might suddenly say, and I began to prepare a defense for my actions, thinking of how frequently I used to act out and how well I was doing at the time. But my wife stayed still and quiet and the therapist asked her one more time, "How does it make you feel."

Tears began to drip from my wife's eyes and she softly said, "Bad." She paused again and said, "I feel like he doesn't love me." At that moment, I made serious resolutions about my recovery, and within a week I attended my first 12-step meeting.

I had been aware of my own guilt for my addictive behaviors, and I had seen my wife weep when I'd confessed to her, and then she'd

forgive me as I swore I would keep trying. But there in the therapist's office, I wasn't feeling guilty, and I think that allowed me to concentrate more on my wife's feelings. Although I was feeling really pretty good about myself, my wife was still carrying a burden that hadn't diminished with my self-declared good behavior. I was devastated to see the pain on my wife's face, to learn that my selfishness had hurt her in a way that didn't just go away after we talked about my addiction.

Sometimes at No-porn.com we'll have a new Support Board member express the perception that pornography doesn't hurt anyone. Then a bunch of people are quick to explain the many, many ways that pornography actually does hurt people. Often, newcomers will describe how the pornography industry abuses or exploits the adult film performer. Some newcomers will develop a level of compassion for porn actors that is definitely unhealthy. I won't forget the new member who created a collage of eyes he copied from pornographic pictures to help him see into the window of their souls and ponder the pain he brought to their lives each time he acted out. As noble as this seemed, I think it just fed his addictive beast, imagining one more fantasy relationship as he tried to "connect" with the real people behind all the porn. I tend not to worry about the porn star; worrying and thinking about porn stars isn't really helpful to my recovery. There are several organizations that help porn stars break away from that industry, but if that becomes my personal mission, I'll spend too much time with porn stars on my mind and in my head, and that may keep me away from what is most important in my own recovery plan.

But pornography does hurt people. The newspapers are filled with stories about people who have gotten deeply enmeshed in pornography and then went out and sexually abused someone. I think of the young married father who abducted a child in his neighborhood and killed and then raped her lifeless body. I think of a man recently laid off for abusing the Internet at work and now is unable to provide for his family. I think of the frat boys who frequently used porn and then, getting drunk at a party, molested a female student.

"But those situations will never happen to me," your addictive voice might be whispering right now. Maybe. But maybe not. Even if we never commit a criminal act, when we use porn we are contributing to an industry that contributes to the sexual abuse of children and adults and is responsible for the deaths of probably thousands of women and children through the sexualization of our society.

As an American citizen, I support the First Amendment of the United States which includes, "Congress shall make no law… abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." I don't want to discuss here the need for prosecuting pornographers or creating stricter laws. I'll leave those things to the Justice Department and the legislature. However, I do want to make sure that we, as people with addictions, cease to contribute to the crime, sexual abuse and death associated with pornography.

Sometimes people who are new to the Support Board will make an interesting distinction when they describe their addiction to pornography: "I never pay for it," they say. Perhaps they see this as

somehow demonstrating that they have never financially contributed to the billions of dollars handed over to pornographers each year. Sometimes it is the fact that they recently paid for pornography that actually gets them to acknowledge their addiction for the first time, as if that was the standard: Never pay for it and you aren't really hurting anyone.

However, think of all the men in this world, and consider the percent that are using pornography on a regular basis. Think of the thoughts in all those brains that tend to objectify people, instead of humanizing them. Think of a society where people forget how to love one another and are driven by lust toward one another. Think of a society where people feel compelled to make themselves objects of lust in order to succeed. Think of the emotional destruction to the self-esteem of millions of men and women with an addiction to pornography. Think of the destruction to the self-worth of those who cheapen themselves in order to garner sexual attention.

Think of the burden pornography places on families. The American Bar Association recently revealed that in a survey of its members, over 50 percent of all divorces in America involved the use of pornography. The divorce rate is at an all-time high. Think of how much stronger families would be if pornography was not making its way into the home. I am not here to define what a family is, but I do know that children raised in a stable environment of love and emotional security do better at school and have a better chance of success and happiness as adults. In my opinion, pornography has done more to destroy families and rob children of their happiness than any

other factor. Pornography destroys self-esteem, confidence and happiness. It destroys marriages. It leads to promiscuity among children, teen pregnancy and death.

Of course, I'm preaching to the proverbial choir, I realize. You understand, perhaps all too well, the destruction caused by pornography. However, there's one form of pornography that I do want to touch on for just a moment: child pornography.

The Center for Missing and Exploited Children distinguishes child pornography from other forms of pornography, referring to it as recorded images of criminal sexual assault of a child. The issue of child pornography is a very difficult thing to discuss. It is a horrid and shocking subject. If you are unfamiliar with the horrifying lengths child pornographers will go to produce and distribute the recorded images of their crimes, I will not darken your life by describing them. I have sat in on U.S. Congressional hearings on the subject, sickened by much of what I have heard, but encouraged to learn of the efforts the U.S. Justice Department and the international community are taking to eradicate this horrendous practice and to incarcerate those who perpetrate it. So many of us have suffered at the hands of others, and because of that, at the Support Board, we do not permit pedophiles to work on their recovery. Their needs are beyond the scope of our board. If you are interested in more information on the issue of child exploitation and pornography, please visit: http://www.missingkids.com

## Key 6:

## A Relapse Doesn't Mean You've Been Wasting Your Time

For many addicts, relapse is part of the addictive cycle. By relapse, I mean going for a time without acting out, but then choosing to use porn once more. It is this constant return to pornography that I refer to as the addictive cycle. I was a binger. I'd go for a few weeks, or maybe even a couple of months without porn. I would feel great about myself. But then, for some reason, I'd feel sexually deprived. Often that was my addictive voice convincing me that I was entitled to sex whenever I wanted sex. And if my spouse was uncooperative, if she didn't feel like serving as the alternative to masturbation, I'd act out with porn. And then, once I acted out, I figured "Why bother?" and I would completely binge until I became so disgusted with myself that acting out became more emotionally painful than abstaining. Only then would the binge stop.

Then I'd stay sober for a while, until once again the pain of sobriety became more painful than the pain of acting out. That was my cycle and it was always very depressing. I'd feel so good about myself after a few months of sobriety. I'd feel cured. I'd be so happy. There was no way, I thought, that I could ever return to my addictive behaviors. At least for a while.

The step that broke that cycle was accountability. Once I found people I could confide in, and once the internet became a place of

accountability for me, rather than anonymity, then I had a way to step back from the secret world of pornography addiction. It was living in that secret world that kept me locked in my binge cycle. But when I became accountable I gained power. By accountability, I don't just mean turning-myself-in-after-the-fact, but sharing with others my struggles when I feel weak, my fears when I feel overwhelmed, and my darkest thoughts when my addictive voice feeds me lies about the pleasure of pornography. Once I learned to share these weaknesses openly with others, I stood a greater chance of remaining sober.

However, even with tools of accountability and serious steps toward recovery, I found myself slipping on occasion. This was before I began to really recognize the role my addictive voice was playing. So I had to learn to treat a slip as the backwards step it was, but not necessarily starting over.

Sometimes on the Support Board, when people relapse, they'll say, "All that time wasted." To me this is classic addictive thinking. Sometimes, it is as if they are saying, "I was sober all month, but I slipped on the last day of the month. I could have been looking at porn all month. All that time wasted." Really, when we slip, we need to acknowledge our failure, but at the same time, we need to acknowledge our progress. "I just went 45 days without porn. I wish I hadn't slipped, but I have never gone 45 days without slipping before."

All this being said about slipping, I truly believe that if we can recognize the addictive voice for what it is (see the opening two chapters), we will remain sober. If we can remind our addictive voice,

"I never use porn or masturbate now," we won't need to worry about slipping. One of the great tools available to help us mean it when we say, "I never use porn or masturbate now," is Sculptor 3, available at No-porn.com. Sculptor 3 is affirmation software. Use the software 10 minutes every morning with the affirmation, "I never use porn or masturbate now," and the phrase will become your reality. There has been much written on the value of affirmations, and you certainly don't need to use expensive software to do them. However, for many of us, the software has been a fantastic tool for making affirmations easy and consistent.

How else do we stay away from the cliff? First we need to put signs up near our own danger zones. Signs that warn us when we are wandering into dangerous territory. One of the 12-step groups, Sex Addicts Anonymous, uses the Three Circles model. These circles lie one inside the other like a target. The outer circle is for all of our healthy behavior. The inner circle is for all of our acting out behaviors. The middle circle, the circle between the outer and the inner circles, is where we post our warning signs.

In the middle circle, we group all the behaviors or even situations that are steps along our way toward the cliff. For me, playing online games is a HUGE warning sign in my middle circle. Online games, for me, are one step away from cyber sex. So when I have found myself playing even the most innocent of games online, I have had to regroup, get accountable and get back into my outer circle. I know from past experience that when I am playing an online game, it

is only a matter of time before I will be looking for someone to chat with inappropriately.

In a sense, business trips are also part of my middle circle. I know that I can't really control whether or not I go on a business trip; however, I do know that they are still toxic for me. And for me, it doesn't matter whether the trip is just a few days or a few weeks, at some point on the trip, usually the last day or two, I am going to seriously want to act out. And so, with my wife (if you aren't married, I suggest that you find another accountability partner), I take some precautions. Some of them may be extreme, but I have learned that if I don't take some serious action, it is very possible that on my trip I will face temptations that I can't resist.

I recently posted an action plan on the Support Board for a ten-day business trip I took. Here's what I wrote:

**Computer:** I will take a lap top; however, my wife and I will set up the filter on the lap top to only access a few web sites that I will need access to, including the No-porn.com Support Board. The laptop also has Covenant Eyes installed and will be sending reports to my wife and another accountability partner.

**Television:** I will have the TV removed from my room when I arrive. I have checked with the hotel and they have absolutely no problem with this. (I still plan to watch a few of my favorite shows on the TV monitors over the treadmills in the exercise room - at least this way, if I want to watch TV, I'll be in public and I'll be exercising).

**Exercise:** See above.

**Entertainment:** I have fun activities planned for nearly every night of the trip with friends who are healthy for my recovery, including spending next weekend with a close relative and his children. I'll also see an NBA game with a friend.

**Spiritual:** I will read spiritual texts every day and pray each day. I will plan to stick to my usual wake up time of 5 a.m. on week days.

**Family:** I will call home every day. I will send some post cards to my children and write a letter to my parents. I will also report on any inappropriate behavior to my wife. I will be sensitive to the tremendous burden my trip places on my wife as she handles children alone.

**Work:** My entire trip is work related with Saturday off, but I will have several big responsibilities that won't go away just because I'm on this trip. I will do something related to my regular work responsibilities every week day.

**Telephone:** In addition to calling home, I will call my accountability partner every morning before starting my day. I will work my recovery with him and seek advice regarding any rough spots I may be having.

**Sleep:** I will take melatonin to help me sleep. If I can't sleep, I will celebrate the fact that despite insomnia and loneliness, I remain sober. *(Note: I talk about more about melatonin in a later chapter.)*

**Personal Intellectual:** I will continue to work on the book I am trying to write on Pornography Addiction.

On that trip, the hotel was very cooperative. If I'm taking a one or two day trip, having the television removed might feel extreme, and may not be as well received as my request was when I was staying for nine nights. But the hotel I stayed at cheerfully obliged my request. (Recently, I learned of a resource to help find hotels that do not offer adult programming: http://www.cleanhotels.com)

I also had Covenant Eyes working on my laptop so that all Internet use was recorded and reported to my accountability partners (including my wife). In addition, I had a filter on my Macintosh iBook (Content Barrier) and turned over administrative rights on the computer to my wife to prevent me from being able to disable my software if I went into addiction "vertigo" – that feeling of falling so fast you think you can't stop yourself.

That was an outstanding business trip and reaffirmed to me the need to be cautious when traveling for business. I remember what it was like on other trips to be tormented by my addictive voice constantly suggesting I relax in front of the television and channel surf for a while or mindlessly surf the Internet. And I also remember how overpowering the temptations can feel when it is 2 a.m. and I can't sleep.

On the last two days of that trip, I began to feel very tempted. A couple of times, I entered into some middle circle type behavior. I was

extremely grateful that I had taken the precautions. After all the years of sobriety and good recovery, I still must exercise caution, and this time it was critical.

On that trip, I experienced serious temptations. Yes, there were many ways I still could have acted out; however, I was working my program, which extended beyond just limiting the availability of pornography. On the days I found myself most tempted, I was able to review my written plan and see if there were any elements I had been overlooking. Indeed, there were. I was able to tighten up my program and endure the temptations.

In the end, I was not particularly proud of the fact that I resisted the temptations. For many of us addicts, feeling tempted reminds us of our weaknesses and that can be a very uncomfortable feeling. There was no pride to be taken in the deep-rooted feelings of need that my addictive voice did a fairly good job of convincing me I was still entitled to. However, in a conversation with my accountability partner on the last day of my trip, he said, "You are running a marathon and you made it to the last mile. Don't blow it." I appreciated the candor, and I pondered the marathon analogy.

On the last mile of that marathon, I couldn't see the finish line, and there was no satisfaction in running the race. I couldn't hear any crowds cheering me on. All I was aware of was the pain. Despite all my preparation for this test of endurance, I wondered if it was really worth it. Yet, at the same time, I knew I was capable of making it to the end

because of my preparations. The only question was if I would choose to endure.

I'll be honest, I did pray. I prayed that my higher power would compensate in any of the areas I had failed to prepare. I asked God to make sure I failed at any attempt to act out. At the end of the race, as I walked through the front door of my home, I was grateful for the support of God, family, friends and members of the Support Board.

But what happens if you don't work your plan? If you forget about your recovery, and you slip? Please don't think of it as time wasted; rather, think of it as a powerful reminder of how important it is to always be proactive in your recovery. Rather than beating yourself up, evaluate what led up to the failure and plan for similar situations in the future. I encourage you to remain accountable to your support network. Report to any accountability partner whom you have agreed to keep informed of your successes and failings. Do not neglect your accountability; do not neglect your apologies. It is appropriate to feel remorse, pain and sorrow about your failure to work your plan. But do not despair. Focus on the changes that need to take place and continue to work your plan in such a way that you will be better able to recognize your addictive voice in the future, so that you will find the strength to shut that voice up when it calls to you.

## Key 7:

## I Don't Have to be Perfect to Recover

When I first started to experience real recovery, I wrote a very personal essay on my history of acting out. Beginning with my earliest recollections of exposure to pornography at age eight, I wrote about discovering masturbation at age 12, I talked about my family's attitudes toward sex and how I was taught about sex in my home, and how that compared with what I learned about sex from friends in the schoolyard. I spoke about early girlfriends and how I feared getting someone pregnant (even though I was a virgin) so I cut off most relationships with girls, since I often sexualized them, perceiving them as objects whose primary purpose was sexual – not in some crude, frat boy way, but in a subtle response influenced by years of being brainwashed by pornography and the media. I acknowledged as an adult how objectifying women impacted my ability to work effectively with them in my profession. I acknowledged how my addiction to pornography was destroying my wife's faith in me as a husband and impacting our ability to communicate in a loving, tender way in all areas of our life, including the bedroom.

Going through this process, was uncomfortable for me. I wrote for pages. I detailed times when my acting out was risky and dangerous (masturbating in a moving car for example, or parked in a parking lot). In many ways, it was a list of regrets. I felt ashamed. And yet I was reminded by a caring friend who was helping me through

this process that I can't change the past, and that shame can be a very toxic emotion if we refuse to let go of past mistakes, if we refuse to forgive ourselves. I was going through this process so that I could forgive those who might have wronged me, and most importantly, so that I could forgive myself. It became a list of things I was going to need to forgive myself for. When I approached it with that understanding, I became more enthusiastic about my list. I was excited to know that these mistakes, some of them quite traumatic, were things that I was going to to free myself of through the very powerful and important process of self-forgiveness.

There are other things we need to forgive ourselves for, including the fact that we aren't perfect. Perfection can be a crippling characteristic. I am not saying we shouldn't strive to improve ourselves each day. But sometimes, those of us who become obsessed with perfection prevent ourselves from making progress. Progress in all areas of personal development is an important part of a well rounded pattern of growth. Understanding our personal weaknesses beyond addiction is an important element of recovery. However, sometimes our addictive voice would have us believe that we will never recover from our pornography addiction if we are impatient, if we get angry, if we are lazy, or if we possess any number of other personal failings.

This misconception can be compounded for some who misunderstand the 12-step program. Personal inventories are part of step four in the 12 steps of recovery. Taking an inventory is a complicated and ongoing process and helps us come to understand our

personal strengths and weaknesses. Once we understand where we can improve, we set out to make the improvements.

However, some would suggest that unless we take care of all those problems, we will never live soberly. I believe this is a misunderstanding. I can live soberly and continue to recover without conquering all my human failings. There is no reason why I can't. The important thing is that I learn to acknowledge my weaknesses, make improvements over time where I can, and abstain from my addictive behaviors.

So, how does one take an inventory? How does one identify personal weaknesses? Importantly, the biggest step toward identifying my weaknesses came after I had abstained from acting out for a time. As I began to refrain from the numbing pleasures of my drug, I became acutely aware of many of the things I didn't like about myself. I was better able to observe my short temper, my resentment, my procrastination, and a host of other unpleasant, but human, tendencies. Of course, seeing all these horrible things in myself made me want to run right back to my drug and blind myself to these things that made me so uncomfortable.

It became extremely important for me to learn to love myself despite my failings – including my addiction. Without feeling love for myself, I would easily spiral into a cycle of self loathing that would only find relief in addictive behaviors. I sought ways to acknowledge to myself that even though I currently had all these horrible traits, I am human and humans have problems; however, humans also have the

capacity to become better people. I want to be a better person, I am working on becoming a better person, and that effort alone makes me worthwhile.

I would like to talk about two of my own personal weaknesses. I have come to believe that these two tendencies are common in almost all porn addicts.

### Resentment

As I first began to live soberly, I became increasingly disturbed by my tendency to feel and express resentment for any person or situation that didn't comply with my immediate desires. This became increasingly evident in the bedroom and in my relationship with my wife, and it became a tremendous obstacle between having temporary periods of sobriety and actually recovering. My addictive voice was furious about experiencing sobriety, and it began to express a sense of entitlement regarding sex. "It's been three whole days since your last orgasm," it would whine. "Doesn't your wife appreciate what you're doing for her by staying away from porn? Has she no compassion? She's rejected your charming seductions two nights in a row! This is insane. How long does she expect you to hang on? How long does she intend to hold out? Sex at such a low frequency rate is hardly worth waiting for. Does she even find you attractive? Where's the satisfaction in making love to a woman who doesn't find you attractive? Perhaps it is time we take matters into our own hands!"

When a feeling of sexual entitlement would begin to surface, rather than turning to porn, I would immediately turn to my wife in an attempt to satisfy my lust. If that didn't work out, I'd begin the pouty dance, tossing and turning in my bed, whining, heaving fatalistic sighs and generally doing everything I could to keep my wife awake. I hoped that she'd see how much I was suffering because she just couldn't understand the natural sex drive of a man, but hopefully she would figure it out soon when she witnessed my misery. If the urge came on during the day, I'd spend the day stomping around, losing my temper with everyone and basically acting like a four year old. What woman wouldn't find *that* attractive?

But sex was not the only thing I felt resentment about. I would bottle up resentment over minor inconveniences – too many chores, assignments at work, kids leaving their toys out – just about any little thing could do it.

As I have said before, resentment for me was a tinderbox. It was a powder keg of TNT just waiting to blow. Lust was the spark.

If I had stored up a bit of resentment, it didn't take much for a little lust to explode into destructive acting out behaviors. However, if I learned to let go of resentment, then when a lustful situation arose I was much better equipped to recognize my addictive voice for what it was and avoid acting out.

Letting go of resentment, for me, was perhaps the trickiest part of my entire recovery. Because of my nearly lifelong addictive

behaviors, I had grown tremendously self-centered – although I was completely ignorant to the fact. I never would have characterized myself as selfish, but when it came to experiencing discomfort my selfishness was mammoth. My selfishness was primarily manifested when I was feeling sexually deprived. It was apparent in my attitudes – a lack of willingness to serve, a tendency to seek personal comforts and a complete disdain for work of any kind. In other people, I have seen resentment manifested in different ways. I know men with sexual addictions who are complete workaholics, which contributes to their withholding emotional energy in their closest relationships with their family. There are many ways selfishness is manifest, but for most of us it is coated in a greasy, flammable film of resentment.

### Anger

Have you ever been really angry at someone for doing something you didn't approve of, when in reality you knew you bore some responsibility for the mistake? I got mad at one of my children once for doing something not too serious, but which I had clearly felt prompted to warn him against earlier. My young son tracked mud through the house. But earlier, I had had a clear impression that I should remind my son to remove his shoes before coming into the house. When he tracked mud through the house, I blew up: How could he be so dumb and thoughtless as to wear muddy shoes in the house. I had clearly thought to remind him about taking off his shoes, but for some reason I didn't. I couldn't admit that as the parent of a young child I had some responsibility for teaching my child the importance of removing his shoes before coming inside on a muddy day, so I yelled at him. By

yelling at him, I was justifying my mistake – I was saying, "I am not responsible. I shouldn't have to remind him. Therefore, this is entirely his fault." So I yelled. I suspect that if I had reminded him, and he'd tracked mud inside, I would have been angry, but I would have handled it differently. I would have scolded him, and got out the mop and vacuum for him, but I would not have lost it the way I did.

Often, when we're enraged with someone, it is because of something we have failed to do, and our anger is used to justify our "correctness" in our own mind. I mention this because it is an example of a personal weakness I discovered as I began to evaluate my addiction. I discovered that I would frequently get angrier than circumstances warranted. I was over-reacting to situations in order to build myself up or prove my so-called rightness, or even righteousness. But the anger was usually covering up something about myself that I was not pleased with. This self-displeasure was painful for me, and what did I use to deal with pain? Porn. In recovery, I became very aware of my anger, and I used it as a signal that there was something about myself that I wasn't liking. This became a warning signal to me that I was walking in a dangerous direction, away from sobriety and back to porning.

In general, I think anger is an emotional defense mechanism. It is what we experience when we are deprived of something we feel entitled to. When my child doesn't do the chores his mother has asked him to do, I feel angry at him for not doing what I expect of him. When a person cuts me off on the road, I feel angry that my course has been altered, or that my safety on the road has been jeopardized. I believe

that I have a right to expect my child to do his chores. I believe I have a right to expect other drivers to drive safely on the freeway.

Unfortunately, my addictive voice feels it has a right to lust and to experience sexual satisfaction. Therefore, when my addiction feels deprived, anger is often the natural result. My anger is my justification to act out; if my needs were being met, I wouldn't be angry. By displaying my anger, I'm sending signals that something is wrong in my life. My addictive thinking believes I can be fixed by porn. When I'm angry, I'm often just defending my addiction's perception that sex and lust are entitlements.

In general, anger is a normal, natural emotion. However, how we express our anger is where we can run into trouble. Certainly, if I am physically harming someone, that is not excusable. Neither is emotionally harming someone. However, as someone with an addiction, assessing the harm I cause in the world around me is not easy to do. Our perceptions are usually way off base when we are so easily influenced by our addictive voice. Recovery is about regaining a more correct perspective on the world.

In general, learning to release our anger and resentment comes with recovery. Just because I yelled at someone I care about, it doesn't mean that I'll never recover. In the past, when I saw my emotions distressed and out of line, I would get discouraged and down on myself. Feelings of frustration would often lead to an urge to act out in order to cover up the dissatisfaction I experienced in my life. But as I've learned to view sex as a small and special part of my relationship with

my wife, but not the defining part, and certainly not an entitlement, my tendency to over react emotionally and to yell at those I care about has decreased. I wish I could say that I never express my anger in an inappropriate way. However, I have gotten better, and will continue to improve. My priority is remaining sexually sober. As I have grown healthier, I have been better equipped to improve these other areas of my life.

When I have gotten myself worked up with resentment or anger, I find myself unable – no, un*willing* – to relax. I cling to my emotions as evidence that the world is cruel and treating me unfairly. This makes it difficult to express real love. And frankly, it makes it difficult to go to sleep at night.

### Reducing Access to Porn

By removing my ability to get a hold of pornography, I lessen my sense of entitlement. Limiting my own access leaves me feeling less tempted. In the world today, it is challenging to reduce our access to pornography, but there are several ways I have found to do this. They work in my situation. Some of them may not work in your situation, but there may be other ways you can think of to lessen your access.. Here are some of the tools that have been helpful for me:

1) *Covenant Eyes*. This software sends a report to my accountability partners each week of the websites I visit. Just knowing that they will see the report takes away much of the temptation.

2) *Internet Filters*. There are many filters available for preventing access to pornography. I actually have my wife monitor the passwords, but any trusted friend would work. No filter is fool-proof, but the filter combined with Covenant Eyes is a very effective way of reducing my sense of entitlement to pornography.

3) *Television Locks*. In the United States, television programs are required to have ratings. The cable and satellite companies provide a parental locking system to block out programs of ratings you determine to be inappropriate. Only a password opens the locks. Again, my wife keeps the password, but a trusted friend works as well.

One night as I was tossing and turning unable to sleep because I felt so sexually deprived, I realized something: I didn't *want* to go to sleep. What I wanted was sex with my wife, but if I couldn't have that, then rather than sleep, I wanted to make sure she knew that her selfishness – as I called it – was responsible for keeping me up all night. I preferred to lie awake as long as I could pouting, even though she was absolutely sound asleep, because the next day I'd be able to say, "I got three hours of sleep last night," and she would know it was her fault. This was horrible addictive thinking. It was stupid addictive thinking.

The addictive beast in my brain was doing everything just to keep me awake. And while it was awake, it would try to convince me

that I deserved to use pornography. So not only was I enjoying my self pity, I was placing myself in a far more vulnerable position. I was much more likely to succumb to temptation when I was resentful *and* tired.

Years before, I tried a sleeping pill on a business trip. For some reason, the next day I woke up with absolutely no voice and I felt terrible. Then a friend who is a psychiatrist suggested I try melatonin. Now, let me say, I'm not a doctor and you should do your own research, but melatonin is a hormone we produce naturally that helps us to fall asleep. Supplements can be purchased at any health food store or pharmacy. I pick it up at GNC. I use either 1mg or 3mg. It doesn't put me to sleep, but it really helps me relax so that I can fall asleep naturally. I have heard some people who struggle with clinical depression say that their physicians have advised them against melatonin, but I've never had any problem with it. So if sleep issues are part of your addiction, you might want to consider melatonin.

Of course, there have been times when I have been so tempted and so bothered by my addiction that I just couldn't sleep. It wasn't a resentment game or a pity party. I just wanted to act out and sleep was not an option. This happens sometimes if I've been asleep for a couple of hours and then get woken up. I remember one night not very long ago that I was sitting at the kitchen table at four in the morning. I'd slept from nine to eleven p.m. and had been up ever since. I was exhausted but couldn't sleep. I sat at the table and I remember thinking, "God, I don't care how exhausted I am tomorrow; I never use porn or masturbate now. I'd rather be exhausted and happy tomorrow

than rested and guilty." So I just sort of endured and made it through the night. Sleep had become less important to me than my sobriety, and what an amazing difference that is in my life.

## Key 8:

## No Religion Has a Monopoly on Recovery

If your faith is the One True Faith, don't you think your God still loves me as much as he loves you, and that he wants to help me recover as much as he wants you to recover?

This is not to criticize anyone's devotion to their faith. I am extremely committed to my own faith traditions. However, I have seen that people of other faiths actually do get sober from this drug. And they do it practicing their own faith traditions. I have seen agnostics and atheists live soberly too.

Which faith traditions they practice doesn't necessarily seem to make the difference. However, their personal values, whether religious or humanistic, can make a difference in their resolve and commitment to recovery. I once heard an evangelical minister who for more than twenty years has been a leader in the fight against the pornography industry say that the faith group that had been the most devoted and engaged in warning its people against pornography were the Mormons. Evangelicals and Mormons are not known as the most compatible groups as I understand it. But he went on and on about what a remarkable job the Mormons were doing in this regard. I would add that I think the evangelical Christians and many other faiths have also been committed in this regard. I have also known Muslim imams who

have been equally committed to helping people live free of pornography.

You see, once one commits to engage God in their recovery process (or as the 12 Step groups say, a "Higher Power,"), something happens. He begins to feel a sense of worth and confidence that transcends his guilt and misery, and raises him out of despair. He becomes humble enough to seek for help outside himself, and he learns to rely on others, and to serve others, and to concentrate every day a little bit more on recovery. For agnostics and atheists, identifying that Higher Power can be a bit more challenging – I once had a 12-step sponsor tell me that for a while his chair was his higher power because the chair was being useful, and was therefore better and more powerful than him. But many friends who do not believe in a divine being find their higher power in the potential of man to rise above his own selfishness and look to ethical law and human idealism for guidance.

I would like to share a story that is extremely personal, and reflective of my own faith as a Christian. Forgive me if you are uncomfortable with that, but I hope the story's point can be instructive to you.

When I was in my early twenties (before the Internet came along), I discovered a new form of pornography that was so exciting to me and such a rush that I immediately tumbled into a pit of acting out. Every other day I would act out in this way. It was a horrible time for me. I was living in a beautiful, northern part of the United States, but

all I could sense was the darkness and despair of my behavior. One day I took a short drive and hiked up a mountain overlooking a waterfall. I sat alone on a rock, trying to sort out my life. I may have been praying, but I don't remember actually praying. What I do remember, however, is that as I sat there a very clear impression came into my head as if a voice was whispering to me, and it said, "Just remember, even Christ had help carrying his cross."

I was stunned by that thought. I remembered the story of Jesus who I considered the Savior of the World as he was marched to Calvary carrying his heavy cross. Apparently, it looked like he might not make it. So the Roman soldiers compelled a Cyrenian named Simon to carry Christ's cross for him.

Those words in my head continued to echo. "Just remember, even Christ had help carrying his cross." I suddenly realized that I was involved in something so serious and so powerful that I couldn't do it alone. I couldn't just will myself into sobriety. This was more than a bad habit, it was an addiction, and for the time being my choices were limited. I needed help, and until I got help I was not going to recover.

So, whatever your faith tradition might be, find your source of strength. My goal is not to convert people to my faith tradition. However, I believe that my God is everybody's God, and that he wants all of his children to recover and find the happiness that comes from living without pornography, regardless of what their personal religious beliefs might be.

## Key 9:
## Healthy Support From a Loved One
## Can Help End an Active Addiction

Sexual addiction is full of sad irony. What most sex addicts crave is human intimacy. What we end up with is the complete opposite. Acting out only reemphasizes and accentuates our feelings of loneliness. In the post depression that always followed my acting out, I usually experienced two related emotions: I was reminded that my experience with pornography was not the real love and intimacy I truly craved, thus increasing my feelings of loneliness; and I felt enough shame that I worked ever harder to hide my addiction – what I saw as my "real" self – from the world. Feeling unworthy of love, I isolated myself even more, which made me more and more depressed and unhappy.

This was my addictive cycle:

Feel lonely
Act out to deaden those feelings of pain
Feel shame
Take action to hide my addiction
Which made me feel lonely… repeat the process …

It was a repetitive cycle and I could see no way of breaking free.

My father had always taught me that the happiest people are risk takers. Studies have proven it, he'd say. Well, I was taking risks ("How close to the adult bookstore do I dare park?"), but they weren't the kinds of risks that were bringing me joy. They were devastating me.

The kinds of risks Dad was talking about required stepping out of the comfort zone and connecting with other people in a joyful way; smiling at the things in life that are truly beautiful; serving others whether or not my act of service was appreciated; revealing something about myself to a loved one, even if it made me appear weak, vulnerable or (surprise, surprise) imperfect. This was all part of what true human intimacy and connection were about.

Recall that my addictive cycle had four parts: 1) Feel lonely, 2) Act out, 3) Feel shame, 4) Hide myself… which led back to feeling lonely. Steps 1 and 3 were feeling steps (loneliness, shame), and steps 2 and 4 were action steps (acting out, isolating myself). I figured I might not be able to do much about my feelings, but I could take small steps outside my comfort zone when it came to acting out and isolating myself.

First, I developed some things I could do to keep myself from acting out so much. I came up with a little phrase I'd say every time I got tempted. As I've mentioned before, that phrase has now evolved into the true affirmation, "I never use porn or masturbate now." I also developed some spiritual habits that I found helpful. Some people use

meditation, some people use prayer, some people study uplifting books… I concentrated a bit on each of these.

And then I did something that was tremendously risky. I did something that definitely required stepping out of my comfort zone. And it also took me outside of the comfort of my addictive cycle because as depressing as that cycle made me, it was also what I was used to and it was indeed my comfort zone. I was so afraid. I was terrified really. I was embarrassed and absolutely humiliated, but

*I…*
*Told…*
*My…*
*Father.*

I have been blessed in my life in ways that others may not have been. I have always known that I have been loved by someone. Even in the depths of my acting out, I knew that my parents loved me. Some people may be frustrated by my statement that I always knew my parents loved me. Please don't misinterpret that to mean that is why I've been able to find some sobriety. Perhaps you might consider the fact that whether a person's parents love them or not, it does not immunize them against this addiction.

My parents were not perfect, but I knew that they had my best interest at heart. Yes, they could flip out sometimes. But they were remarkably there for me and my siblings. I will also note that my parents were not prudes, either, and much of what got me hooked on

porn was found in my own house… we didn't have the pornographic magazines, but there were some sex manuals I found to be fascinating at a pretty young age. I didn't want to blame my parents for my addiction, but I decided that I did need to let my father know of my struggle.

I'll never forget his reaction to my confession. He wept. He teared up. He wasn't one to make me feel guilty for masturbating, but when he learned how frequently I was masturbating – nearly daily, sometimes more – I think he came to understand certain things about me that suddenly made sense. He probably saw things about me that I couldn't see, and when he learned that I was seriously struggling with this type of compulsive behavior, well, I just think some pieces came together for him, and it broke his heart. I think he ached for me in my struggle. Frankly, his reaction was perfect.

We talked. Of course, as you know, that didn't solve all my problems. I had years of worse things lying ahead. But for about three years after that conversation, I was free of the compulsion to even masturbate. The transformation was remarkable. Before we spoke, I felt helpless and powerless to stop. However, after we spoke, something changed inside of me. First, he gave me excellent counsel, counsel I've tried to include in what I have written here. Second, he kept me accountable. Once in a while, he'd ask how I was doing. I wish he'd kept me more accountable, but having even a little bit of accountability was helpful to me. Third, I had taken that terrifying but ultimately joyful risk. Fortunately, it had gone well. And taking that

risk was taking action that was contrary to my cycle and pulled me outside of my comfort zone.

Since that time, there have been others I have had to confide in to make my pathway to recovery easier. I have confided in ecclesiastical leaders who have counseled me and directed me toward professional resources and other tools for support. I have confided in professional therapists who have brought expertise and perspective that I had not considered before. They have also helped me to see my own patterns of addictive thinking, and called me on my rationalization and denial. I have confided in my fellows within 12-step groups who have sacrificed their time on my behalf to help me gain some understanding of this addiction and of my own vulnerability to it.

And I have had to confide in my wife. As I've mentioned, I first revealed my struggle to her when we were engaged, and although I saw her concern, it took several years of marriage to see how deeply I was hurting her. Being accountable to her has been difficult. My addictive voice likes to tell me that when I share my struggles with her, I worry her and make her sad. "Better not to let her know you were triggered by that piece of junk mail," it says. "If she thinks you can be triggered that easily, she won't be able to trust you and she'll suffer needlessly because, of course, she can trust you." But I've learned that by sharing with her on a regular basis – not obsessively, but just checking in regularly – she trusts me more, even when I'm telling her that a certain commercial really made my day difficult.

Sometimes, being accountable to her makes me feel childish. My wife doesn't see it that way, and she doesn't act like the pornography police, or snoop into everything I do. I feel as though she trusts me on this, but only up to a point. She believes I can live soberly, but that it is easier for me to do so if there are certain rules and systems in place. She manages the adult lock passwords on our television system. And she manages the passwords on our family's Internet filter. We also use Covenant Eyes and she receives a weekly report on all the Internet use on our computer at home. My office computer also has filtering software and generates usage reports that my boss sees. These systems don't mean I'm failing in recovery; however, they do acknowledge that I am weak. Perhaps *weak* isn't the right word because it has taken a lot of strength and diligence to establish all these systems, and a real commitment to living without pornography. However, they acknowledge that I am *vulnerable*.

My wife does not feel responsible for my sobriety. She knows she can't make me live without porn. Early on, one of the most painful things for her to deal with was the jealousy involved. Addicts understand, but their significant others don't, that porn is not about the physical attractiveness of your partner. My wife is unquestionably gorgeous. Pornography addiction is a reflection of my own selfishness and inability to deal with discomfort. It is about medicating myself, not about being dissatisfied with my spouse. My wife's beauty didn't make it any easier to recover. My wife's beauty had nothing to do with my acting out. In reading and speaking with others, she came to see this addiction for what it was, and realized there was nothing she could do to make me recover – she could only be there as a support.

Someone once asked “How do you know he won’t act out again.” To which the reply came, “You don’t. That’s what trust is about. Not knowing for sure.” When you find someone who cares about you, and not necessarily in a romantic way, they can be such a tremendous support for you. Whether it is someone in your family, in your church, or in a support group, you have someone on your side, and the cycle begins to break apart, and you can begin to experience the freedom that comes with accountability. But almost always, finding that person requires stepping outside of our comfort zones.

## Key 10:
## I May Always Be Susceptible

Finally, after years of successful recovery and sobriety, you begin to realize you may always be vulnerable to this temptation. Remember, for three years after my conversation with my father, I was free from compulsive masturbation. And yet, I fell back into it. How different that is from the newcomers to our board who taste their first sample of freedom, recognize how delicious it is and declare, "I'm cured!"

While I say, "I never use porn or masturbate now," I have also known that with that knowledge comes the responsibility to avoid situations that will make me vulnerable. As I have discussed, I have had to increase my accountability regarding the Internet. I have had to block certain web sites that might not really be considered a problem for others, like sites for chat software, or peer-to-peer file sharing software.

And this awareness of my vulnerability and susceptibility is perhaps the hardest part of my addiction for me. Yes, I experience the joy of living soberly, and yet, every time I am tempted, every time a lustful thought flutters across my mind, every time I feel an urge to use the Internet inappropriately or the temptation to dial the phone sex line just to hear the intro teaser, I have to implement my plan: recognize the addictive voice; remind my beast that "I never use porn

or masturbate now;" step away from the access point (Internet, phone, etc.); rub a banana in my hair, or if one isn't handy, pray; remind myself that pain and loneliness is a part of life; look for a way to connect with a real person through phone calls, conversation or service; try to help someone else with their own recovery; etc., etc.

Every time the temptations weigh me down, and the plan interferes with my life, I feel a little depressed actually. It isn't until later that I am able to feel true gratitude for my sobriety. When I'm tempted, I feel like I'm less of a man, that I'm not the hero I wish I was, and I just feel crummy. I feel the weighty, sad depression that I used to medicate away with my drug: pornography. But later, as the urges subside, and eventually they do, I am so grateful for my plan, so grateful for my sobriety, so grateful to God for my life. I hope it is a useful one.

I have to work each day on recovery in some way or another. I just assume that whatever it was that made me vulnerable in the first place is still part of who I am now.

It might have been hormones that got me started on porn. I still have a normal sex drive and I need to be careful that I don't do anything to get those hormones juiced up inappropriately. I try to limit the kinds of movies and TV shows I watch, and I refrain from ogling and fantasizing about women on the street.

Maybe it was curiosity that got me hooked on pornography. Even now, once in a while, I'll hear of some new way to act out and I'll

wonder, “What would that be like?” I keep my curiosity in check. When something like that comes up, “I never use porn or masturbate now” becomes an even more important reminder.

It could have been loneliness that drove me to porn. I have had to learn that loneliness is part of everyone’s life. It is normal. It doesn’t feel great (at least to me). It is something I have to accept and learn to endure. On the other hand, there are steps I have learned to take to really connect with people in satisfying and meaningful ways. I found people with whom I share common interests. I participate in activities with them. I’ve read books on shyness and on making small talk and winning friends and influencing people. These things have helped me take risks and step out of my comfort zone, and the results have been a substantial decrease in loneliness.

Some people don’t want to be labeled as an addict their whole lives. I certainly understand that. I always thought of myself as having an addiction, not actually being an addict. What I do accept though is that pornography is something I am vulnerable to and probably always will be. Everyone has limitations. Some people have health issues. Some suffer from crippling depression. Some people have other forms of addiction. We all have something that slows us down. But we learn to compensate. I learn to compensate for my inclination toward porn by putting up filters and blocks and making sure I stay accountable to my wife and a friend. I make sure I continue to go to see my therapist, even when I feel completely healthy. It has been a tremendously helpful commitment for me to make.

There are just things we have to do to make up for the things we're bad at. I'm bad at keeping my thoughts clean. I do things to compensate. The compensation is what makes me strong, just like a wheel chair would help someone without legs get around town.

I'm sure my experience is unique in many ways, but I have learned from my fellow sojourners that an addiction to porn has many commonalities. As we travel together, we can lift one another and keep one another from giving up. How grateful I am for my sobriety. How grateful I am for the members of the No-porn.com Support Board. How grateful I am for examples I have had in my life who have walked far ahead of me along the path to recovery and who have helped me navigate choppy waters.

In the introduction to this book, I wrote about my friend who had just been reprimanded for looking at porn at work. Since I began this writing project, he and I have both grown in important ways. I am pleased to report that he has remained sober from pornography and has even been promoted at work. Although he still knows any slip up will result in his termination, his sobriety has resulted in improved productivity, energy and confidence which have led to increased management responsibilities. I have seen these results time and time again. I have seen them in my own life. I have experienced remarkable joy in my family, in my work and in my soul for making choices each day that keep me sober and free. I hope and pray that something in this book might help you come to know the same joy.

*Please send your feedback to:* TenKeys@no-porn.com

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

You may click the following hyperlinks:

No-porn.com

No-porn.com Support Board

Covenant Eyes Accountability Software

Support Groups

B-Safe PC filter

Content Barrier filter for Macintosh

Hypnosis Download

Melatonin available at GNC

www.MissingKids.com

www.cleanhotels.com

Books:

- Don't Call it Love
- Out of the Shadows
- Rational Recovery
- Bonds That Make Us Free
- Other Titles